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Nixon Daughters: Can They Keep Their Jewels?

By Maxine Cheshire

State Department legal officers have interpreted the law barring U.S. officials and their families from accepting foreign gifts to exclude "an adult son or daughter living in his or her own household."

Such an exemption would apply to, among others, the married daughters of President and Mrs. Nixon. Both have received valuable gifts, including jewels, from foreign donors since their father took office in 1969.

The interpretation is contained in a memorandum issued Wednesday "reminding" the heads of all federal agencies that their employees must comply with the Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act of 1966. Valuable foreign gifts to all government employees and their families are deemed public property under the act, the memo notes, and should be turned over to the Chief of Protocol "as quickly as possible" for processing.

(No time limit for turning over such gifts is specifically set in the act and Protocol has not ruled on this controversial issue previously. Recent news accounts have noted frequent delays of a year or more in turning over such gifts.)

The State Department interprets the law in this week's memo to exclude adult children who are not individually covered by the act, if they are nondependent and do not live under the same roof as parents or relatives who are covered.

State Department officials said yesterday that it is unclear whether this means a diamond-and-ruby pin given Julie Nixon Eisenhower and a diamond-and-sapphire pin given Tricia Nixon Cox by Saudi Arabian Prince Sultan in July, 1972, are covered by the act.

While both girls were married before that date they have frequently returned to stay at the White House for brief or extended periods when they were ill or when their husbands were away fulfilling military obligations or at times of family crisis.

Deputy Chief of Protocol Stuart Rockwell said last night that he is "of the opinion that anything given to the President's daughters while they were living at the White House comes under the law."

Newspaper files record that Tricia Cox and her husband "lived" at the White House from June until November of 1972, while he studied for the New York state bar exam.

Other news stories indicated that Mrs. Eisenhower was also at the White House during July, 1972. But the White House said last night that there are "no records" to indicate whether she was living there or just visiting.

The White House has previously been under the impression that the Nixon daughters were prohibited

See VIP, E4, Col. 1

VIP, From E1

under law, as are their mother and father, from keeping foreign gifts of more than minimal value.

White House counsel J. Fred Buzhardt declared in May that the Nixon family considered all such gifts "public property" under the law and intended to put them in "a public repository when the President's term ends."

First Lady Pat Nixon's press secretary, Helen Smith, said yesterday that the White House first learned that the Nixon daughters may have been exempt from the 1966 law after their marriages "just before the President and Mrs. Nixon left for the Middle East" on June 10.

Mrs. Smith said that she had asked the Protocol Office to send her "something to clarify just who was and was not covered in the 1966 law."

"I read it and saw that it did not apply to the Nixon daughters," she said. "I sent it up to Mrs. Nixon so that she could read it herself."

Under the State Department's interpretation of the law, the Nixon girls could keep anything sent to them by foreign leaders with whom the President conferred on his recent travels to Russia and the Mideast.

Mrs. Eisenhower and Mrs. Cox did not accompany their parents to the Middle East or to Russia and Mrs. Smith said last night that she is "not aware" that any gifts were sent back for them except for "some linens" from the Israeli government.

While saying she had not talked with them about the new State Department memo, Mrs. Smith insisted that "there is nothing new" in the exclusion of adult, non-dependent children from the 1966 law.

"Our records show that those who helped draft the law never intended that it include emancipated children," a member of the legal advisory office says. "If Congress intends us to include these children, they should amend the law to read 'a member of the family *or* household.' As it reads now it is 'a member of the family *and* household' and that is the key word for us."

The State Department has complained previously that the 1966 law is "vague and ambiguous."

Gifts From the Brezhnevs

Among other state gifts presented them on their Russian trip, President and Mrs. Richard M. Nixon received jewels and a painting from Soviet Communist Party secretary and Mrs. Leonid Brezhnev.

A White House spokesman said Thursday the President received a painting of Moscow by night and the First Lady, a set of amber jewelry set in gold.

Other gifts from the Brezhnevs represented the different Soviet republics and included a lace tablecloth, a vase painted with scenes of Moscow, and a box encrusted with semi-precious jewels for Mrs. Nixon.

The President gave Brezhnev, a car buff, a Chevrolet Monte Carlo sports car, under the auspices of General Motors. The Nixons also presented the Kremlin leader with a set of plates with scenes from Winslow Homer paintings, and a silver epergne with crystal bowls.

there would be no effort to take advantage of the exclusion interpretation.

"They are turning everything in and intend for it all to go some day to the Nixon Library," she said. "They don't intend to keep any of it."

What other gifts of jewels or other valuables have been received by the Nixon daughters since their father became President in 1969 is unknown. The White House has repeatedly refused to open the records of its Gifts Unit to the press or public on the grounds that such disclosures might embarrass foreign donors and cause "diplomatic problems."

The State Department memo, dated July 1, was sent out Wednesday to "remind" government employees of all agencies, whether civilian or military, "of their responsibilities under the (Foreign Gifts and Decorations) act and regulations."

Under the law, any gift of more than $50 value from "any king, prince or foreign state" is deemed to be the property of the U.S. government and must be turned over to the Chief of Protocol for cataloging and disposition.

The law states that "all employees of the United States government" and "members of the families and households of such employees" are covered by its provisions.

The State Department memo further defines "member of the family and household" as "a relative by blood, marriage or adoption who is a resident of the household."

A State Department spokesman maintained yesterday

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